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ABSTRACT

The South Pacific School Libraries Project was launched by UNESCO in 1978 and continued until 1991. It was designed to improve school library service in the 11 independent island states (Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Turaw, Vanuatu, and Western Samoa) of the Southwest Pacific and to develop training programs for teachers and school library staff in the region. The paper also describes some of the methods and materials developed to provide library services to a very isolated rural population. (KRN)

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UNESCO School Libraries in Oceania Project

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The provision of education including library services has been difficult for the independent island states of the South West Pacific.

The eleven independent island states of the South West Pacific range in size from the 26 sq. km. of Tuvalu to the second largest island in the world, Papua New Guinea. The region has a population of around 4.5 million people, with a little over 3 million of these living in Papua New Guinea. The other 1.5 million people live on island groups scattered over 30 million kilometres of ocean and only 65,000 km of this area is land. Most countries in the region are low income countries with Gross Domestic Product per capita ranging from $304 in Niue to $1,465 in Fiji. Phosphate rich Nauru is the exception to this with a GDP of over $20,000.

THE SOUTH PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES

Country	Status	Land Area (sq. km.)	Est. Pop. (mid 1983)	GDP Per Capita $A
Cook Islands	Self governing 1965	240	18,060	941
Fiji	Independent 1970 Declared Republic 1987	18,272	676,000	1,465
Kiribati (formerly Gilbert Islands)	Republic 1979	690	61,000	718
Nauru	Republic 1979	21	8,000	20,203
Niue	Self-governing 1974	259	3,000	304
Papua New Guinea	Independent 1975	461,691	3,192,000	780
Solomon Islands	Independent 1978	28,530	259,000	549
Tonga	Independent kingdom 1970	699	104,000	395
Tuvalu (formerly Elice Islands)	Independent 1978	26	8,000	504
Vanuatu (formerly New Hebrides)	Republic 1980	11,880	124,000	826
Western Samoa	Independent 1962	2,935	161,000	310

Source United Nations Population and Vital Statistics Report 1 July 1984
South Pacific Commission.

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There are Meleansian, Polynesian and Micronesean people in the region and all 3 peoples can be found in a single country like Papua New guinea or the Soloman Islands. More than half the world's languages are spoken in this region with more than 700 languages being spoken in Papua New Guinea alone and another 700 languages spoken on the other islands, while the Polynesian countries such as Tonga and Western Samoa have a common national language, there is no common language that is spoken in the Meleansiana countries like Vanuatu or the Solomon Islands. In these countries pidgin English has become a "common" language and is widely spoken. The lack of a common language has meant that there has been little local publishing and most materials used in schools and found in school libraries is in English. English is usually a second or third language for Pacific Island children.

The Majority of Pacific Islanders still live in rural situations. About 90% of Soloman Islanders live in rural areas and even in comparatively urbanised Fiji, only about 39% of the population live in towns and cities. As a consequence of this most schools are small. Since most library services are found in urban areas, the vast majority of Pacific Islanders have no access to any kind of library service, including school libraries.

In many of the Pacific Islands countries education is not compulsory and there is usually a fee charged to attend school, consequently very few children have much schooling and only a minority of children will have attended secondary school. School libraries, where they exist, are usually found in secondary schools therefore most Pacific Island children will never have used a school library.

There are few trained school librarians in the region. Some overseas volunteers have worked in school library services and a few teachers have undertaken library training in one of the two library education programmes operating in the region or have attended overseas library schools. However, few trained librarians actually go back to work in schools, but rather are assigned to central school library services positions or obtain position in other agencies.

Most Pacific Island Nations have little money for library services. In 1990 the total amount of money allocated for overseas book purchases and periodical subscriptions in the Solomon Island was SID $12,000 (about $4500 US dollars). All of this was spent on the National Library Pacific Collection leaving all other library services to rely on donations and overseas aid.[1] It has been the experience of most South Pacific School libraries that material donated by overseas libraries and other agencies is often outdated, not of a suitable reading level or is inappropriate for the local school curriculum.

In order to assist with the development of school libraries the 20th General Conference of UNESCO approved a project in 1978 which would promote the development of school libraries in Asia and Oceania. This project was proposed by the government of Australia which wished UNESCO to follow up the recommendation of the UNESCO Regional Seminar on School Libraries held in Perth in August 1976. Consultant Dr. Lawrence McGrath travelled the region in 1980 and 1982 to investigate the state of school libraries there and to look at ways of improving the situation. Dr. McGrath pointed out the general lack of libraries, especially in primary schools, the shortage of books in the region, the lack of trained staff and the general unawareness of teachers and school administrators with regard to the use of a range of educational resources and libraries in teaching and learning situations. This latter observation led to the recommendation that courses be developed to introduce teachers to the value of educational resources and to the effective use of these resources in learning.

This need was also highlighted at a workshop for teachers and teacher librarians in Suva, Fiji in October 1981. Workshop participants recommended that "*as first priority... assistance be provided through the UNESCO School Library Development Project in the south Pacific for the further provision of short courses for all teachers...*"

UNESCO accepted this recommendation and a team of Australian library educators lead by Margaret Trask prepared two courses for training teachers in the use of libraries, and for training

school librarians. The courses, designed for both traditional classrooms and distance education, were published by UNESCO in 1981.[2]

A regional meeting of librarians and educators from the Pacific region was held in Suva, Fiji in November 1983. The purpose of this UNESCO-funded meeting was to examine the course material to see if it met the needs of the region.

The UNESCO course was first trialled in 1984 at the Lautoka Teachers College in Fiji. In that year 58 students completed the course. Other teachers colleges in the regional introduced the course in 1986 and is has also been used in Africa and in other areas outside the region.

In order to ensure that each country in the region has qualified individuals to teach the course, UNESCO sponsored a workshop in Sydney, Australia in July-August, 1985. The course for national Trainees had 16 participants, both librarians and teacher educators from 10 Pacific nations. The participants were given detailed notes on teaching specific parts of the course, they experimented with a variety of teaching techniques and developed educational resources that could be used in teaching the course.

Training programs were conducted for library staff in Western Samoa in 1986 and in Vanuatu in 1989. While visiting rural schools in Vanuatu, project consultants Barbara Poston-Anderson and Joe Hallein recognised that a traditional school library service would not be possible in many Pacific Island Schools. This is because most schools are small, in the Solomon Islands 15% of schools have one or two teachers schools; 60% have between 3 and 5 teachers and only 25% have 6 or more teachers. Most schools are not large enough to supports a school library and have not facilities for using audio-visual material or for duplicating material, electricity being found in only a few centres. Multi-grade and multilevel instruction is needed in most schools because very few are large enough to stream pupils of equal ability. consequently, schools need to have access to educational resources that can be used independently by students of various levels and can be

used to support a variety of subjects. Non-print materials is mostly limited to charts, posters and audio-cassettes.

It was decided, therefore, to conduct future workshops on the effective use of easily accessible and inexpensive resources such as puppets, drama and movement, and book reports and discussions by teachers, as well as in-service training for librarians.

Training programs were held for primary school advisers in 1990 and 1991 in Vanuatu and these advisers then held workshops on the use of educational resources in schools, a video on the topics was also produced as part of the programs. Educators throughout the region see the lack of educational resources as a major educational problem. In a survey in 1984, 48 senior officials attending The National Primary Education Curriculum Development workshop were asked to indicate what factors were a major problem in implementing a effective curriculum 88% indicated that it was the availability of teaching/learning materials.[3] The UNESCO School Library Project in Oceania is attempting to assist educators in developing techniques to effectively create and utilise these scarce educational resources.

In the 13 years since its launch, the UNESCO Project has made a solid contribution to the improvement of school library services in the Oceania region. A competent and enthusiastic group of people has been trained, who now, in turn, are training others in this crucial aspect of children's education. Training courses prepared under the programme have proved so successful that UNESCO's PGI team has used them as a model in other, similar projects around the world.

With the increasing awareness of the importance of introducing children to a wide range of educational resources and of making these resources and information more accessible, it is vital that school library services become a central aspect of education. They are finally becoming a reality in primary and secondary schools across the South Pacific.

1 Solomon Island National Library Service Newsletter No.13, December, 1990.

2 Course for Teachers on the Use of Information Resources and Libraries. UNESCO, Paris, 1982.

3 Solomon Island Ministry of Education Training and Cultural Affairs. Workshop Report and Plan of Action: National Primary Curriculum Development Workshop. Honiaria, July 1984.